



Learning Lifeline

A LETTER ABOUT LEARNING FROM ESTHER WILKISON

When I think of a lifeline, I remember all the times that, as a lifeguard trainer, I used to stand on the dock teaching potential lifeguards how to throw a ring buoy.

It's a tricky skill because—with one hand—you have to accurately direct the buoy and let go at just the right time while—with the other hand—you have to let just the right amount of line feed out. Often the first attempts ended with the buoy and all of the rope in the water. Or sometimes the buoy would accidentally hit the swimmer who was acting as a pretend victim for the guards-in-training.

Those early throwing attempts gave us some great laughs. My students kept practicing until they could accurately toss the ring within easy reach of a distressed swimmer while keeping a tight hold of the end of the rope that would become a lifeline should they ever need this skill to help someone in crisis.

In crisis is exactly how many have told me they feel after the challenges and losses of the past two years. That's why I'm launching this Lifeline Newsletter. I can't make the challenges and losses stop, but I want to connect with you and provide practices and encouragement to support you as you help others thrive.

But here's the problem—no matter how much hope and help comes through a Lifeline Newsletter, it is useless unless you take hold. I doubt you need more data in these days of information overload, which is why I'm not writing to give *information* so much as *formation*.

We all get pushed and pulled by the constant demands on us. Yet, we are formed in large part by the people we connect with and the things we practice over and over. Our connections and practices have the power to form or de-form us.

This brings us to the first practice I want to encourage you to establish. Each time you see a message from Learning Lifeguard in your inbox, give yourself the sweet gift of time to read and consider.

It can be hard for us to stop long enough to invest even a few minutes to refresh our own souls. Rest assured, this kind of investment is not selfish. A car on empty can fulfill its purpose only when it gets refilled. Much as we know this applies to us, it is easy to zoom past potential filling stations. The one who lies, kills, and destroys wants to keep us distracted by demands until we are stranded in isolation—miles from the joy that God intended to be our strength.

Our defeated enemy would be delighted for us to ignore our humanity and try to function, machine-like, 24/7. I'm convinced that self-compassion is a way to defy him while accepting the kindness God knows we need as humans. That's why I'm asking you to continue to invest in refreshing your soul. When you do, you will be reminded that you are loved and supported in your work of loving and leading those God has given you.